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SOME SPANISH AMERICAN POETS



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# Some Spanish-American Poets

By

Elijah Clarence Hills

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## SOME SPANISH-AMERICAN POETS.\*

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In the introduction to the first volume of his *American Letters* (*Cartas Americanas, 1a serie*, Madrid, 1889) Juan Valera, the eminent novelist and literary critic, and one-time minister to Washington, said: "In the natural and exact sciences, and in industry and commerce, English America . . . has prospered more; but one may say without boasting that in letters, with regard to both quantity and quality, Spanish America is in advance of English America." The distinguished Hispanic scholar, Professor James Fitzmaurice-Kelly, in his *History of Spanish Literature* (New York, 1908), gives the reply courteous to Valera in these words: "He (Valera) rarely writes without establishing some ingenious and suggestive parallel or pronouncing some luminous judgment; but . . . his desire to please often stays him from arriving at a clear conclusion . . . his *sauve complaisance* becomes a formidable weapon in such a performance as the *Cartas Americanas*, where . . . you set the book down with the impression that the writers of the South-American continent have been complimented out of existence by a stately courtier."

After reading many volumes of Spanish-American verses, one is led to believe that Hispano-American poetry, though more voluminous, is probably not a whit finer and nobler than that of English America; and that, on the other hand, it is in no-wise inferior. In attempting to study the poets of Spanish America, one is confronted with a bewildering array of mediocre poets, above whom seem to rise here and there a greater artist. But, after all, whatever one's choice of these artists may be, it will have been largely influenced by personal taste; and it is, therefore, with considerable diffidence that six poets have been chosen, not as certainly the best in every respect, but as

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\*This article has been given as a lecture at Harvard University, the University of Wisconsin, the University of California, and Colorado College.



representative of the best that Spanish America has given to the world of letters.

The two most notable women-writers of Spanish America are Avellaneda and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Much has been written about Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda y Arteaga (1816-1873), the romantic poetess, who was born in Cuba but went to Spain at the age of twenty, and is therefore generally considered a Spanish rather than a Cuban writer. Sor Juana Inés (1651-1695), the Mexican nun of the seventeenth century, is not so well known. Her worldly name was Doña Juana Inés de Asbaje y Ramírez de Cantillana, and it is no wonder, therefore, that she preferred the simple pen-name of "Julia." The lady first saw the light of day in a village near Mexico City. Her father, Don Pedro Manuel de Asbaje, was a Basque of good family, and her mother was a Mexican lady of Spanish descent, Doña Isabel Ramírez. Tradition holds that Juana Inés was a precocious child, as tradition is wont to hold with regard to children who had in them the germ of greatness. It is said that when she was only three years of age she slipped away to school one day with an older sister, and learned to read and write before her mother knew that she was going to school at all. When still a small child she astonished her parents by announcing that as cheese dulled the intellect she would eat no more of it. At the age of seven or eight years Juana Inés began to write verses, her first composition being one in honor of the Blessed Sacrament. As there were no colleges for women in Mexico during the seventeenth century, our little lady is said to have begged her father to let her dress as a man and thus attend one of the colleges in Mexico City. This request was refused by an unsympathetic father; but he allowed her to begin the study of Latin with a tutor. With only twenty lessons, supplemented by much private reading, Juana Inés acquired so complete a command of Latin, if her biographers can be trusted, that she wrote and spoke it perfectly. But after all these exaggerated statements have been sifted, the fact remains

that the child had intellectual curiosity in an unusual degree, as may be gathered from this statement that occurs in her writings: "Since the first light of reason illumined me, I had so vehement and strong an inclination to letters, that neither the reproofs of others, of which I have had many, nor my own reflections, of which I have made not a few, sufficed to turn me from this natural impulse which God gave me. . . . Since in women the natural beauty of the hair is so highly esteemed, I cut off five or six finger-lengths of mine, . . . and imposed upon myself the law that when it grew again to where it was before, if I did not know this or the other thing which I had set out to learn in the meantime, I should cut it off again as punishment for my stupidity; . . . for it did not seem reasonable to me that a head so bare of ideas should be adorned with hair."

When still a young girl Juana Inés became a maid-in-waiting in the viceroy's palace, where her beauty and wit attracted much attention. But she soon renounced the worldly life of the court, and apparently moved by a determination never to marry, joined a religious order. In the convent of San Jerónimo she turned for solace to books. She was an indefatigable reader, and in time she accumulated a library of four thousand volumes, as well as several musical instruments and some scientific apparatus. Two years before her death Sor Juana received from the bishop of Puebla a letter that affected her greatly. The bishop censured her devotion to worldly studies, and urged her to give her mind thereafter entirely to God. The sister, who was now forty-two years old, complied with the advice even more fully than the good bishop had intended. After selling her books and instruments and giving the proceeds to the poor, Sor Juana made a general confession, wrote with her own blood a solemn declaration of faith, and renouncing all worldly things during the remaining months of her life, she gave herself entirely to religious meditation and penance.

On reading the verses of Sor Juana, one is immediately

struck by their unevenness. The defects and errors, of which there are many, seem largely due to hasty improvisation or to the dark and devious ways of Gongorism. In this connection, however, and in all fairness to the poetess, one must acknowledge that most of her verses, considering the period in which they are written, are extraordinarily free from Gongoristic exaggeration. Her better verses are of two kinds: those that give evidence of an unusual degree of cleverness and mental acuteness, and those that have the ring of spontaneity and sincerity. She was rather too fond of making a display of her cleverness on all occasions, and only in some of her erotic and religious poems does this fondness for display sink beneath a rising tide of tumultuous passion. As an exponent of erotic mysticism Sor Juana is most interesting. In the most passionate of her erotic verses there is an apparent sincerity which makes it difficult for the lay reader to believe that she had not been profoundly influenced by human love,—as when she gives expression to the feelings of a loving wife for a dead husband, or laments the absence of a lover, or tells of a great jealousy.

In addition to her lyrics, Sor Juana wrote three *autos* (short dramatic compositions in which the characters are biblical or allegorical): *The Scepter of Saint Joseph* (*El Cetro de San José*), *Saint Hermenegild* (*San Hermenegildo*), and *The Divine Narcissus* (*El Divino Narciso*) which is the best of the three and contains some beautiful mystic songs; and two secular plays: *Love is a Greater Laberynth* (*Amor es Más Laberinto*), from the story of Theseus and Ariadne, and *The Obligations of a House* (*Empeños de una Casa*), an imitation of the *capa y espada* drama of Calderon. It was unfortunate for the fame of Sor Juana that her poems were first published (Vol. I, Madrid, 1689) under the bombastic title, *Castalian Inundation of the Unique Poetess and Tenth Muse* (*Inundación Castálida de la Única Poetisa, Musa Décima*), Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz; but such titles were then in fashion.

As to the place held by this Mexican nun in Spanish



literature, critics, of course, disagree (if critics agreed, there would be no need of critics). Menéndez y Pelayo, in his *Anthology of Spanish-American Poets*, Vol. I, declares Sor Juana superior to all other Spanish poets of the reign of Charles the Second; but this, after all, is not great praise, for good poets were not numerous during that period. Pimentel, in his *History of Mexican Poetry*, censures Juana Inés's frequent errors in diction and in prosody and her occasional Gongoristic expressions, and proclaims the Mexican friar, Manuel Navarrete (1768-1809), a greater philosophic and religious poet. But when all has been said and done, the fact remains that Sor Juana is Mexico's greatest poetess, and her finest poems may be read by all with pleasure and profit. Her most widely known verses, but by no means her best, are the quatrains in defence of woman. The following lines are a free rendering of some of the stanzas of this poem:

Oft you do everything you can  
To lead a woman into shame,  
And then, unjust and foolish man,  
You give the woman all the blame.

You seek to kiss her modest lip,  
You lure her with the sirens' call,  
You do your best to make her slip,  
And yet you blame her if she fall.

Your humor, Sir, so strangely grim,  
Completely lacks a sense of right:  
Why do you make the mirror dim  
If you desire it to be bright?

And who is worse, now tell me, pray,  
Who most excites old Satan's grin,  
The one who weakly sins for pay,  
Or the strong man who pays for sin?

Oh you should try, at any price,  
To shield a maid from sin and shame;  
But if you lead her into vice,  
You ought to love her just the same!

The three pre-eminent classic poets of Spanish America are Bello of Venezuela, Olmedo of Ecuador, and the Cuban Heredia. Of these, Don Andrés Bello (1781-1865) was the most consummate master of poetic diction, though he

lacked the brilliancy of Olmedo and the spontaneity of Heredia. Born in Caracas and educated in the schools of his native city, Bello was sent to England in the year 1810 to further the cause of the revolution, and he remained in that country till 1829, when he was called to Chile to take service in the Department of Foreign Affairs. His life may, therefore, be divided into three distinct periods. In Caracas he studied chiefly the Latin and Spanish classics and the elements of international law, and he made metrical translations of Virgil and Horace. Upon arriving in England at the age of twenty-nine years, he gave himself with enthusiasm to the study of Greek, Italian and French, as well as to English. These nineteen years in England were still a part of the formative period of Bello's life, for, unlike Sor Juana, his development was slow. He read and wrote incessantly when not engaged in giving private lessons in order to earn his livelihood,—for he received little support from America. He came to know many scholars, and he was especially intimate with James Mill, whom he is said to have helped to decipher an enigmatic document of Bentham, and with Blanco-White, and other Spanish men of letters who were living there in exile on account of their liberal views. Bello joined with the Spanish and Hispano-American scholars in London in the publication of several literary reviews, notably the *Censor Americano* (1820), the *Biblioteca Americana* (1823), and the *Repertorio Americano* (1826-1827), and in these he published many of his most important works. Here appeared his studies of Old French and of the *Song of My Cid*, his excellent translation of fourteen cantos of Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato*, several important articles on Spanish syntax and prosody, and the best of all his poems, the *Silvas Americanas*.

In 1829, when already forty-eight years of age, Bello removed to Chile, and there entered upon the happiest period of his life. Besides working in a government office, he gave private lessons until in 1831 he was made rector of the College of Santiago. In the year 1843 the University

of Chile was established at Santiago, and Bello became its first rector. He held this important post till his death twenty-two years later at the ripe age of eighty-four. During this third and last period of his life Bello completed and published his *Spanish Grammar* and his *Principles of International Law*, works which, with occasional slight revisions, have been used as standard text-books in Spanish America, and to some extent in Spain, to the present day. The *Grammar*, especially, has been extraordinarily successful, and the edition with notes by José Rufino Cuervo is still the best text-book of Spanish grammar we have. In the *Grammar* Bello sought to free Castilian from Latin terminology; but he desired, most of all, to correct the abuses so common to writers of the period, and to establish linguistic unity in Spanish America.

Bello wrote little original verse during these last years of his life. At one time he became very fond of Victor Hugo and even tried to imitate him; but his classical training and methodical habits made success difficult. His best poetic work during his residence in Chile, however, are translations of Victor Hugo, and his free metrical rendering of *La Prière pour Tous* (from the *Feuilles d'Automne*), is amongst his finest and most popular verses.

It is interesting that Don Andrés Bello, a distinguished scholar in linguistics and in international law, should also have been a pre-eminent poet. All critics, except possibly a few of the present-day "modernistas," place his *American Silvas* amongst the best poetic compositions of all Spanish America. The *Silvas* are two in number: the *Allocution to Poetry* (*Alocución a la Poesía*), and the *Silva to the Agriculture of the Torrid Zone* (*Silva a la Agricultura de la Zona Tórrida*). The first is fragmentary: apparently the poet despaired of completing it, and he embodied in the second poem an elaboration of those passages of the first work which describe nature in the tropics. The *Silvas* are in some degree imitations of Virgil's *Georgics*, and they are the best of Spanish imitations. The great literary critic, Menéndez y Pelayo, was willing to admit (*Antología de*

*Poetas hisp.-am.*, II, p. CXLII) that Bello is, "in descriptive and georgic verse, the most Virgilian of our (Spanish) poets." Caro, in his splendid biography of Bello (in Miguel Antonio Caro's introduction to the *Poesías de Andrés Bello*, Madrid, 1882) classifies the *Silvas* as "scientific poetry," which is quite true if this sort of poetry gives an esthetic conception of nature, expressed in beautiful terms and adorned with descriptions of natural objects. It is less true of the *Allocution*, which is largely historical, in that it introduces and sings the praises of towns and persons that won fame in the revolutionary wars. The *Silva to Agriculture*, which is both descriptive and moral, may be best described in the words of Caro. It is, says this distinguished critic, "an account of the beauty and wealth of nature in the tropics, and an exhortation to those who live in the equator that, instead of wasting their strength in political and domestic dissensions, they should devote themselves to agricultural pursuits." Bello's interest in nature had doubtless been stimulated by the coming of Humboldt to Caracas in the first decade of the nineteenth century. In his attempt to express his feeling for nature in poetic terms, he probably felt the influence not only of Virgil, but also of Arriaza's *Emilia or the Arts* and of the several poems descriptive of nature written in Latin by Jesuit priests, such as the once famous *Rusticatio Mexicana* by Father Landívar of Guatemala. And yet there is very little in the *Silvas* that is directly imitative. The *Silva to the Agriculture of the Torrid Zone*, especially, is an extraordinarily successful attempt to give expression in Virgilian terms to the exotic life of the tropics, and in this it is unique in Spanish literature. The beautiful descriptive passages in this poem, the noble ethical precepts, and the severely pure diction, combine to make it a classic that will long hold an honored place in Spanish letters.

Although the poetry of Ecuador is of relatively little importance as compared with that of several other American countries, yet Ecuador gave to the world one of the

greatest of American poets. Don José Joaquín de Olmedo (1780-1847) was born in Guayaquil when that city still formed part of the Viceroyalty of Peru. Consequently two countries claim him,—Peru, because he was born a Peruvian and because, furthermore, he received his education at San Marcos University in Lima; and Ecuador, since Guayaquil became permanently a part of that republic, and Olmedo identified himself with its social and political life. Olmedo ranks as one of the great poetic artists of Spanish literature at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He is of the same neo-classic school as Quintana, and like him devoted to artistic excellence and lyric grandiloquence. Olmedo's serious poems are thoroughly imbued with the Graeco-Latin classical spirit. His prosody nears perfection; but it is marred by an occasional abuse of verbal endings in rime, and the inadvertent employment of assonance where there should be none, faults common to many of the earlier Spanish-American poets. His greatest poem is *The Victory of Junin* (*La Victoria de Junin*), which is filled with sweet-sounding phrases and beautiful images, but is, logically, inconsistent and improbable. Even Bolívar the Liberator, to whom the poem is addressed, censured Olmedo in a letter for using the *machina* of the appearance at night, before the combined Colombian and Peruvian armies, of Huaina-Capac the Inca, "showing himself to be a talkative mischief-maker where he should have been lighter than ether, since he comes from heaven," and, instead of desiring the restoration of the Inca dynasty, preferring "strange intruders who, though avengers of his blood, are descendents of those who destroyed his empire." *The Song to General Flores* (*Canto al General Flores*) is considered by some critics to be the poet's most finished work, though of less substance and inspiration than *The Victory of Junin*. This General Flores was a successful revolutionary leader during the early days of the republic, and he was later as bitterly assailed by Olmedo as he is here praised. Of a different type is the philosophic poem, *To a Friend upon the Birth*



of *His First Child* (*A un Amigo en el Nacimiento de su Primogénito*), which is filled with sincere sympathy and deep meditation on the future. With the coming of middle age Olmedo's poetic vein had apparently been exhausted, and the Peruvian poet Felipe Pardo addressed to him an ode in which he sought, though to no avail, to stimulate the older bard to renewed activity. Olmedo, as a poetic genius, loomed suddenly upon the horizon of Guayaquil, and after his departure, there was for years no one to take his place. In politics Olmedo was as prominent as he was in letters. A jurist of note, he was sent by his native city in 1810 to the Spanish Cortes at Cadiz, where he took an important part in the deliberations of that revolutionary body. Soon after his return to America in 1816 he was selected by Bolívar to represent Colombia at the Court of Saint James, and in England he became a close friend of Bello. After the secession of Ecuador from the earlier Colombia, Olmedo was honored from time to time with high political offices. The best edition of Olmedo's *Poesías* is that of Garnier Frères, Paris, 1896, with notes and a biographical article by Clemente Ballén.

The Cuban poet, Don José María Heredia (1803-1839), is better known in Europe and in the United States than either Bello or Olmedo, since his poems are more universal in their appeal. He is especially well known in the United States, where he lived in exile for over two years (1823-1825), at first in Boston and later in New York. Although Heredia died

"Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita,"

his brief pilgrimage through life was crowded with varied experiences. Born in Cuba, he studied in Santo Domingo, and in Caracas (1812-1817), as well as in his native island. Accused of conspiracy against the Spanish government, he fled to the United States in 1823, and there eked out a precarious existence by giving private lessons. In 1825 he went to Mexico, where he was well received, and where he held several important posts, including those of member of Congress and judge of the superior court. In Heredia's

biography two facts should be stressed: that he studied for five years in Caracas, the city that produced Bolívar and Bello, respectively the greatest general and the greatest scholar of Spanish America; and that he spent only twelve years, all told, in Cuba. As he lived for fourteen years in Mexico, that country also claims him as her own, while Caracas points to him with pride as another child of her older educational system.

Heredia was most unhappy in the United States. He admired the political institutions of this country; but he disliked the climate, and he despaired of learning English. In one of his patriotic hymns, *To Emilia*, he says:

"The furious north-wind roars,  
And borne upon its wings the stinging ice  
Swoops down upon us and devours the earth.  
A fog doth veil the splendor of the sun,  
And hides from us the sky  
Which on the dim horizon is confused  
With the gray sea. The naked trees are scourged  
By wintry blasts, and toss and groan in pain.  
No living thing is seen amid the fields  
Where desolation reigns and solitude. . . .  
Oh, shall my suffering eyes ne'er see again  
The gently swaying leaves of graceful palms  
As they glow golden in the western light?  
Shall I not mock the glare of midday sun  
'Neath the banana's loudly rustling leaves,  
While gentle breezes fan my heated face?"

With regard to the English language, he adds:

Instead of thy sweet speech, I hear, alas!  
The strange, harsh sounds of a barbaric tongue.

And in one of his letters to a friend in Cuba he says: "I do not understand how so great a people has come to use so execrable a jargon." Some of the North-American customs also seemed strange to him, as when he wrote: "Here one may kill a man with his fists without fear of punishment; but they hang without fail one who attacks another with a pointed knife. Thus it is that here table knives have rounded ends so as to avoid trouble."

Let me add by way of digression that Heredia, who was a cousin of the French sonnetist of the same name, was not

the only Cuban poet to suffer persecution. Of the seven leading Cuban poets, often spoken of as "the Cuban Pleiad," Avellaneda removed to Spain where she married and spent her life in tranquillity; and Joaquín Luaces avoided trouble by living in retirement and veiling his patriotic songs with mythological names. On the other hand, José Jacinto Milanés lost his reason at the early age of thirty years, José María Heredia and Rafael Mendive fled the country and lived in exile; while Gabriel Valdés and Juan Clemente Zenea were shot by order of the governor-general. Truly, in Cuba, the wages of poetry is death!

Heredia, unlike Bello and Olmedo, was not a classic scholar. His acquaintance with the Latin poets was limited and seldom does a Virgilian or Horatian expression occur in his verses. Though, strictly speaking, not a romantic poet, he was a close precursor of that movement. His language is not seldom incorrect or lacking in sobriety and restraint; but his numbers are musical and his thought springs directly from imaginative exaltation. Heredia's poorest verses are doubtless his early love-songs: his best are those in which the contemplation of nature leads the poet to meditation on human existence, as in *Niagara*, *The Temple-Pyramid of Cholula* (*El Teocalli de Cholula*), *In a Tempest* (*En una Tempestad*), and *To the Sun* (*Al Sol*). In these poems the predominant note is that of gentle melancholy. In Cuba his best known verses are the two patriotic hymns, *To Emilia*, and *The Hymn of an Exile* (*Himno del Desterrado*). These were written before the poet was disillusioned by his later experiences in the turbulent Mexico of the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, and they are so virulent in their expression of hatred of Spain that Menéndez y Pelayo refused to include them in his *Anthology*. Heredia undertook to write several plays, but without success. Some translations of dramatic works, however, were well received, and especially those of Ducis's *Abufar*, Voltaire's *Mahomet*, and Alfieri's *Saul*. The Garnier edition (Paris, 1893) of Heredia's *Poesías* contains an interesting introduction by the literary critic, Elías Zerolo.

That great extent of fertile plains and lofty mountains, which is now called Argentina, was of comparatively little importance in the literary history of the Spanish colonies, as compared with the populous and cultivated vice-royalties of Mexico and Peru. Argentina was actually governed from Lima, Peru, till 1778 when the new vice-royalty of Buenos Aires was established. And yet today it is the rival of Chile for the hegemony of the Spanish-American states, and Buenos Aires is the largest and wealthiest Spanish-speaking city in the world.

Don Olegario Víctor Andrade (1838-1882) is generally recognized as one of the foremost poets of America (his *Obras Poéticas* were published by the Argentine government,—Buenos Aires, 1887). In art, Andrade was a disciple of Victor Hugo; in philosophy, he was a believer in modern progress and freedom of thought. His verses have inspiration and enthusiasm; but they are too often marred by excessive grandiloquence combined with incorrectness of speech. *Atlántida*, a hymn to the future of the Latin race in America, and *Prometeo*, an ode to the emancipation of human thought, are the poet's noblest works. The following translation of a few stanzas of *Atlántida* will give some idea of its content:

The passing centuries the secret kept.  
 But Plato saw it dimly when beside  
 The Aegean sea, he gazed upon the shadows  
 Falling softly on Hymettus' peak,  
 And spake mysterious words with restless waves  
 That groaned beneath his feet. He knew the name  
 Of this last child of Time, destined to be  
 The Future's bride, where dwells eternal spring;  
 And called it fair Atlantis.  
 But God thought best to give the mighty task  
 To Latin men, the race that tamed the world,  
 And fought its greatest battles.

And when the hour was struck, Columbus came  
 Upon a ship that bore the fate of Man,  
 And westward made his way.  
 The wild tumultuous Ocean hurled against  
 The tiny Latin ship the black north wind,  
 While whirlwinds roaring fiercely rode astride  
 The lightning's blood-red steed.  
 Forward the vessel moved, and broke the seal  
 Of Mystery; and fair Atlantis woke  
 At last, to find her in a dreamer's arms!

Often the victor over thrones and crowns,  
 The restless spirit of the ancient race  
 Had found fulfilment of its noblest dream,—  
 Abundant space and light in distant zones!  
 With armor newly forged, nor dragging now  
 The blood-stained winding-sheet of a dead past,  
 Nor weighted down by blackest memories,  
 Once more it ventured forth in eager quest  
 Of liberty and glory.

Before it lay a vast, unconquered world.  
 Here, resting on the sea, 'neath tropic skies,  
 And bathed in the white light of rising dawn,  
 The Antilles lift their heads, like scattered birds  
 That utter plaintive cries,  
 And dry their snowy wings that they may fly  
 To other, distant shores.

Here rises Mexico above two seas,  
 A granite tower that even yet would seem  
 To spy the Spanish fleet as it draws near  
 Across the Aztec gulf;  
 And over there Colombia, lulled to sleep  
 By the deep roar of Tequendama's fall,  
 Within its bosom hides unfailing wealth.

Hail, happy zone! Oh fair, enchanted land,  
 Belovéd child of the creative sun  
 And teeming home of animated life,  
 The birth-place of the great Bolívar,—hail!  
 In thee, Venezuela, all is great:  
 The flashing stars that light thee from above;  
 Thy genius and thy noble heroism,  
 Which with volcanic force and deafening crash  
 Burst forth on San Mateo's lofty peak!

Outstretched below the Andes' mighty chain,  
 Like one who weeps above an open grave,  
 The Incas' Rome doth lie.  
 Its sword was broken in the bloody strife,  
 And in obscurity its face was sunk.  
 But still Peru doth live!  
 For in a virile race  
 Defeat doth spell a new, a nobler life.  
 And when propitious toil, which heals all wounds,  
 Shall come to thee at last,  
 And when the sun of justice shines again  
 After long days of weeping and of shame,  
 The ripening grain shall paint with flowers of gold  
 The crimson cloak that o'er thy shoulder floats.

Bolivia, namesake of the giant\* born  
 At Mount Avila's foot,  
 Hath kept his lively wit and valiant heart,  
 With which to face the storm and stress of life.

---

\*General Bolívar.



It dreams of war today; but also dreams  
Of greater things, when 'stead of useless guns,  
The engines made of steel  
Shall boldly bridge the vales and scale the hills.

And Chile, strong in war and strong in toil,  
Hangs its avenging arms upon the wall,  
Convinced that victory by brutal strength  
Is vain and empty if it be not right.  
And Uruguay, although too fond of strife,  
The sweet caress of progress ever seeks;  
Brazil†, which feels the Atlantic's noisy kiss,  
With greater freedom were a greater state;  
And now the blessed land,  
The bride of glory, which the Plata bathes  
And which the Andean range alone doth bound!

Let all arise, for 'tis our native land,  
Our own, our native land, which ever sought  
Sublime ideals. Our youthful race was lulled  
E'en in the cradle by immortal hymns,  
And now it calls, to share its opulence,  
All those who worship sacred liberty,  
The fair handmaid of science, progress, art. . . .  
Our country turns its back on savage war,  
And casts away the fratricidal sword,  
That it may bind upon its haughty brow  
A wreath of yellow wheat,  
Lighter to wear than any golden crown. . . .  
The sun of ultimate redemption shines  
On our beloved land, which strides ahead  
To meet the future, and with noble mien  
Offers the Plata's overflowing cup  
To all the hungry nations. . . .

With the appearance in 1888 of a small volume of prose and verse entitled *Azul*, by Don Rubén Darío (1864-) of Nicaragua, came the triumph of the "movement of emancipation," the "literary revolution," which the "decadents" had already initiated in France, and in its train there came inevitably a general attack on poetic traditions. This movement was hailed with joy by the young men of Latin America, who are by nature more emotional and who live in a more voluptuous environment than their cousins in Spain; for they had come to chafe at the coldness of contemporary Spanish poetry, at its lack of color and its "petrified metrical forms." With the success of the movement there was for a time a reign of license, when poet vied with

†These lines were written before Brazil became a republic.

poet in defying the time-honored rules, not only of versification, but also of vocabulary and syntax. But as in France, so in Spanish America, "decadence" has had its day, though traces of its passing are everywhere in evidence, and the best that was in it still lingers.

When reproached by the Spaniards for their imitation of French models, the Spanish Americans make this reply: "We imitated your neo-classicism and your romanticism, both of which you borrowed from France: now we prefer to borrow directly." In this connection it is interesting to note that the decadent movement was felt later and to a less degree in Spain, and some Spanish-American writers even hold that it came to Spain from America. These writers also tell us modestly that their form of Castilian (which they call *neo-español*) is more expressive and ornate than that which is still spoken on the arid plains of the two Castiles, and that their bards are superior in number and in quality to those of Spain.

Today their poets are turning their attention more and more to the study of sociological problems or to the cementing of racial solidarity. These notes ring clear in some recent poems of Darío, and of Don José S. Chocano of Peru, and Don Rufino Blanco-Fombona of Venezuela. The following lines are a translation of an ode by Darío, which was addressed to Mr. Roosevelt when he was still president of this country. The meter of the poem is mainly the Old Spanish Alexandrine, but with a curious intermingling of shorter lines. In all fairness it should be stated here that Señor Darío, in a recent letter to the writer of this article, has said: "I do not think today as I did when I wrote those verses."

'Tis only with the bible or with Walt Whitman's verse,  
That you, the mighty hunter, are reached by other men.  
You're primitive and modern, you're simple and complex,—  
A veritable Nimrod with aught of Washington.  
You are the United States;  
You are the future foe  
Of free America that keeps its Indian blood,  
That prays to Jesus Christ, and speaks in Spanish still.

You are a fine example of a strong and haughty race;  
 You're learned and you're clever; to Tolstoy you're  
     opposed;  
 And whether taming horses or slaying savage beasts,  
 You seem an Alexander and Nabuchadnezzar too.  
 (As madmen today are wont to say,  
 You're a great professor of energy).  
 You seem to be persuaded  
 That life is but combustion,  
 That progress is eruption,  
 And where you send the bullet  
 You bring the future.

No.

The United States are rich, they're powerful and great  
 They join the cult of Mammon to that of Hercules),  
 And when they stir and roar, the very Andes shake.

Our America, which since the ancient times . . .  
 has had its native poets; which lives on fire and light,  
 perfumes and on love; our vast America,  
 the land of Montezuma, the Inca's mighty realm,  
 Christopher Columbus the fair America,  
 America the Spanish, the Roman Catholic,  
 men of Saxon eyes and fierce, barbaric soul,  
 the land still lives and dreams, and loves and stirs!  
 Take care!  
 The laughter of the Sun, the Spanish land, doth live!  
 From the Spanish lion a thousand whelps have sprung!  
 Heed, Oh Roosevelt, that you be God himself . . .  
 That you hold us fast in your grasping, iron claws.

Though you count on all, one thing is lacking: God!

ELIJAH CLARENCE HILLS.

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